



## **Inspirational Health Stories**

### **Regina D. Coles from Atlanta, Georgia - My Journey to Living a Healthier Lifestyle**

At the age of forty, my health was something that I took for granted. I was 165 pounds and I wore a size 16. I was eating whatever I wanted to eat without any thought of how my eating habits were affecting my health.

I failed to get regular physical exams during this time because I felt fine and I saw no reason to schedule regular doctor's office visits. However, all of that changed with an office visit that I scheduled with a new physician. He explained to me what cholesterol and heart disease were, as well as other health problems that develop as we age.

My test results indicated a cholesterol level of 304, and my blood pressure was elevated as well as my sugar level. I was shocked to learn that all of this was going on at the same time and I was determined that I was going to follow the lifestyle changes that my doctor recommended. He added that making these changes would lead to a healthier and happier way of living.

My doctor advised me to begin an exercise program that I could enjoy so that I could remain motivated enough to stick with it. The next day I began to run on a nearby high school track. When I first began, I only ran as far as I felt comfortable running, then I would stop and start to walk. I gradually increased my distance to 3 miles. I always made sure that I had plenty of water to drink after my run.

The next change I had to make was my diet. When my doctor explained the changes that I had to make, I thought he was joking. It turns out that he was quite serious. He recommended chicken and fish, which had to be broiled or baked without the skin. I could eat lean cuts of beef twice a week prepared the same way as the skinless chicken and fish. I also had to learn to eliminate some of the fat from my foods. I became conscious of how much fat I was consuming. I also began to read the labels on the food I bought and began making better choices.

Of course I complained because I missed my old way of preparing my meals. You see, I loved fried fish and chicken and fresh collards, turnips, cabbage

and green beans prepared with salt pork. I must admit that I was truly amazed when at the end of six weeks I noticed that I was actually losing weight as a result of my lifestyle change.

I realized six months later that this new lifestyle change would become a permanent way of living because one of the benefits was my changed attitude towards life. I began to develop a positive attitude towards life. I also became more outgoing and ready to face new challenges.

After one year, my blood pressure drastically declined and so did my sugar level. My weight returned to normal and I learned to enjoy my new way of eating. I looked and felt younger and I noticed that I had more energy.

Of course I've faced some illnesses along the way, some more serious than others. Last year I experienced an illness that was potentially fatal. I was told by my doctor that my survival was possibly due to the diet and exercise changes that I had made many years ago and maintained throughout the years.

By the time I became an older American I was celebrating a new body with a transformed mind. I feel that the changes that I was determined to make in my younger years have greatly affected my health and appearance today.

Thanks to the lifestyle changes that I made nearly thirty years ago, today I feel great and I am blessed to be an active, healthy and productive older American.